

(1998) First Television Interview Eckhart Tolle (1998).mp4

[Speaker 2] (0:02 - 0:24)

Hello, welcome to CONTACT. I'm Nina Rhodes. And today we are truly privileged to have as our guest Mr. Eckhart Tolle, who has written a wonderful book called The Power of Now, A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment. And I want to meet him immediately because this book is so fascinating and gives us all the information we really need to know about living life to its fullest. Welcome, Eckhart.

[Speaker 1] (0:25 - 0:25)

Thank you.

[Speaker 2] (0:25 - 0:41)

I have read the book, and I cannot tell you how important it has been to my life. And I know that this was an incredible journey that took you to writing this wonderful book. So would you kindly enlighten us as to what your journey was?

[Speaker 1] (0:42 - 4:06)

Well, it kind of goes back to my early 20s. I'll just briefly tell you a psychological transformation that I went through at that time, virtually an overnight transformation. I had just been awarded a scholarship, research scholarship, for Cambridge University, so I'd been doing quite well on an external level.

Everybody considered that my life was successful. But inside, I was suffering from very deep depressions and continuous states of anxiety. And I had been suffering from that for years.

So I was actually miserably unhappy, while everybody else around me thought that I was a very successful person. So there was one night when I reached a kind of depth of depression, and a thought kept reoccurring in my mind that I can't live with myself any longer. The pain of this dreadful unhappiness is too much.

I can't take it anymore. I can't live with myself any longer. And that sentence became a trigger for a transformation.

I cannot live with myself any longer. And suddenly, I thought, what does this mean? Who is the I, and who is the self that I cannot live with?

There was a kind of separation that occurred at that moment. I separated myself, my sense of identity separated from the unhappy, depressed, and anxious person. And suddenly, there was me here observing that unhappy self.

So there was a disidentification. And I thought, how is that possible? I can now observe the unhappiness as if it were in me, but not essentially me.

So I describe that in a little bit more detail in the book. When I woke up the next morning, I was in a state of very deep peace. And that lasted for several months, and it never really left me.

But that deeply blissful state lasted for several months. And I didn't know what had happened to me. How is it possible that from one day being a very anxious person, I could suddenly become transformed into a deeply peaceful person?

It was only years later that I understood what actually had happened to me at that time. So in a way... What was it?

It's a realization that the suffering me is ultimately a fiction of the mind. I had created a mental fiction that I believed in and identified with. You could call it the ego.

And through the pressure of suffering, I separated from that fiction. And when I separated from that fiction, it collapsed as if a plug had been pulled out of an inflatable toy, because it ultimately wasn't real. I realized then that the suffering self wasn't ultimately real.

It was a fiction. And in a way, that's also the basis of the book. And when I later started to work with people, very often people came to me who were in some kind of suffering, some form of pain.

And what I'm trying to convey and teach is that it is possible to live free of suffering, to go beyond suffering.

[Speaker 2] (4:07 - 4:35)

Well, the expression that I'm really fond of is, instead of saying, I am upset, because the I am is self, saying, I'm having an upset. Or I am angry. I'm experiencing anger.

Of course, you wouldn't say that, I'm experiencing anger. But to say, I am upset or I am sick, you know, is really sort of embedding that into yourself, where you say, you know, I'm having an upset. Well, if you have something, you can give it away.

[Speaker 1] (4:35 - 5:03)

That's right. So it's already progress if from saying, I am angry or I am upset, you say, there is anger in me or there is upset in me. You have already separated your essential identity from the emotional state.

So you are no longer reinforcing the emotional state through your identification. So that's already the beginning of inner transformation. It's that separation from the

passing mental or emotional state.

[Speaker 2] (5:03 - 5:09)

Well, that's such a wonderful time in life when suddenly you realize that you don't have to be the victim of your thoughts.

[Speaker 1] (5:09 - 5:10)

Yes.

[Speaker 2] (5:10 - 5:35)

That you can shut those off just through the power of being in the now and understanding what you have written in this book. Now, the word enlightenment has been tossed about in so many different expressions, meanings, philosophies. Could you explain to us what the book embraces with the power of now a guide to spiritual enlightenment?

What is enlightenment?

[Speaker 1] (5:36 - 7:47)

Well, as you say, the word has been used a lot of times and people attribute different meanings to it. But the word enlightenment essentially comes from the East, originally from Buddhism. It points to a radical psychological transformation.

But it's not confined to the East. It also exists in other ancient religions. The term salvation in Christianity, I believe, is really another form of the Buddhist enlightenment.

Or the term liberation in Hinduism is really just another way of pointing to the same thing. So they all point to the possibility of a radical inner transformation. And before we look at that, we need to realize that urgent need in the human psyche, the personal psyche and the collective psyche, for a radical psychological transformation.

All the ancient religions recognized that there is something wrong with human beings. Despite the ingenuity of the human mind, there seems to be some essential flaw which causes humans to go into suffering, to create suffering and pain for themselves and for others. And the ancient religions have given different names to that essential flaw.

So Buddhism, for example, straightforward calls it suffering. One of the characteristics of human existence, Buddhism says, is suffering. Hinduism says humans are in a state of delusion.

There's a veil of Maya. We do not perceive things clearly. We see them as through a veil.

So we are deluded. Christianity says there is an original state of sin that humans are in.

So if you look at the deeper structure underlying all those terms, what it's really saying is there's something not right.

Something seems to have gone wrong. But all the religions also say there is a path, there is a way of reversing this. So there's the bad news, which all religions agree on, and there's the good news, which also all religions agree on.

[Speaker 2] (7:48 - 7:57)

And do they agree in the process that it would take to create this so-called enlightenment? Because we do live, and I know this just in everyday life, people live in a state of victimhood.

[Speaker 1] (7:58 - 9:05)

Yes. Essentially, yes, the process is the same. Sometimes the names and the terminology differs, but the essential process is the same.

And really what it starts with is to disidentify from the thinking mind. Now, this for some people may be a new thing, because most people are totally identified with their thought processes. So they are kind of trapped in their mind.

And most people almost never experience a gap in the stream of mind. So the mind is like a river that pulls you along. And another way of describing it is to say that it's almost as if somebody had built a noise machine into your head.

It would be a fiendish thing to do. Imagine some demon builds a noise machine into your head, and it doesn't have a switch-off button.

[Speaker 2] (9:05 - 9:32)

Oh, it's so true. It's that constant inner dialogue that you feel, you know, can I quiet my mind? And the native cultures have a saying that it's a trickster, which is the trickster keeps trying to trick you into these negative thinking patterns, and there are ways to quiet the mind and be still.

Yes. And people feel, I think, even if there's a lull in the conversation, people feel they must fill it immediately because the thoughts are going so quickly.

[Speaker 1] (9:32 - 10:40)

That's right. That's right. So there is a way, and in a way the first step is stand back inside yourself, take one step back and observe what the mind does.

So you become the observer of your mind. That's a very essential step. And then you'll find that there are certain patterns that occur again and again, thought patterns, often

negative ones.

They're like old gramophone records that perhaps have been playing in your mind for years. So you take a step back and say, oh, there's my mind. I can observe the thoughts that go through my mind.

So your sense of identity shifts from being the thought to being the observer of your thoughts, sometimes called the witness. So you are witnessing all the thoughts that go through your mind, and that's a very essential shift in identity. In a way, you withdraw more deeply into yourself from where you observe the flow of mind, the flow of thinking.

[Speaker 2] (10:40 - 10:51)

And in the flow of mind, witnessing your thoughts, is this without judgment, without editing it, saying, oh, I don't want to think that, or whatever. So it's then without judgment and without editing what the thought flow is.

[Speaker 1] (10:51 - 10:56)

That's a very good point, because the moment you judge what you're observing, that's the mind again.

[Speaker 2] (10:56 - 10:56)

Yes.

[Speaker 1] (10:56 - 11:26)

So it's only when you're free of judgment and you're simply almost like a mirror that just shows you what the mind is doing. You're not taking any position and say, I like that or I don't like that. You allow the thoughts to be.

But if you allow the thoughts to be, they lose their energy, because you're no longer feeding them energy through your identification. It's when you're totally identified that all the thoughts actually feed on you, on your life energy.

[Speaker 2] (11:27 - 11:27)

Yes.

[Speaker 1] (11:27 - 11:33)

And you then find that a lot of your thinking is actually completely useless.

[Speaker 2] (11:34 - 11:44)

It's true, especially in the middle of the night when you're solving every single problem

in the world in your mind and you wake up in the morning and certainly it wasn't that bad, and you're not solving it anyway by tragedizing.

[Speaker 1] (11:44 - 13:50)

Yes, and in fact it was creating problems rather than solving. Exactly, like sleeplessness, tiredness for the next day's productivity. That's right.

So that's the first step. Now the next step is to consciously, occasionally create little gaps in the stream of mind. That can start with a simple thing like taking one conscious breath.

Just taking one conscious breath. A conscious breath means you're focusing your attention on the breathing. You observe how the air flows into your body and out of your body.

Now by doing that, you take attention away from thinking, because you're now observing the breath directly. It flows in and out. And during that time, which may only be ten seconds, the mind is still.

You've taken consciousness, by choice, you've taken consciousness away from the mind and put it onto your breathing. So you've created a little gap in the stream of mind. And in that gap there's the dimension of inner stillness.

And that's a wonderfully liberating thing. Suddenly, stillness. And in that stillness, if you go more deeply into it, there's also a very subtle joy.

There's even love. There's a presence. It's kind of finding a deeper you, a deeper sense of self than the mind that you find in that stillness.

And this is just one example. You take a conscious breath. And use moments when the gap occurs naturally.

For some people it happens when they go out into nature. You're surrounded by trees in the forest. And you're suddenly overwhelmed by the beauty of nature.

And when that happens, also for that moment, the mind stops in the stillness.

[Speaker 2] (13:51 - 13:52)

Like a sunset.

[Speaker 1] (13:52 - 15:04)

Yes. Something overwhelmingly beautiful can sometimes create that stillness. And for most people it only lasts for a few seconds.

But if you become conscious of it, you can actually prolong it and go into it and feel the stillness inside you. So it can happen through beauty. It can also happen for other people through physical exertion when they are engaged in some kind of physical activity, perhaps even jogging, although some people wear Walkman while they jog, so it can't happen then.

But extreme physical exertion can sometimes also lead to mental stillness. So you can find it there. Other people find it in a moment of extreme danger.

I don't know if you've read accounts of people. I've seen quite a few accounts of people who were driving in a car and they knew an accident was about to happen. There were only a few seconds left and they could see it's inevitable now.

And at that moment many people reported that suddenly they became very, very still and peaceful and they became just the observer of what was happening and there was no fear.

[Speaker 2] (15:04 - 15:46)

Yes, it seems to go in slow motion. I noticed that the other day. I was jogging and I began to fall, and as I fell it was just like in slow motion.

And I've experienced when there is danger, you sort of just experience it in a very different manner of thought and emotion. And the breath is, you've taught this, you do exquisite meditation sessions because I've been privileged to be present. And my husband was telling me that he uses the breathing when he can't sleep at night, when his mind starts.

And the breath is a very profound thing and we take it for granted because we're so busy with the mundane. But most meditative processes start with taking breath.

[Speaker 1] (15:47 - 15:47)

Yes.

[Speaker 2] (15:47 - 16:00)

And you just breathe. And the breathing itself is a very profound method of just quieting and understanding the miracle of breath and the body and just being at quiet with self. So I see what you say by the magic of that.

[Speaker 1] (16:01 - 18:16)

Yes, breath is a very old form of meditation. It's probably the Buddha who first created it. The Buddha's teaching is so simple and really one of the main points is be conscious of your breathing.

Anapanasati Yoga is the meditation on your breath, the breath awareness meditation. And why it works so beautifully is that it takes attention away from thinking. It takes consciousness away from thinking.

And then it becomes what I call presence. If you take consciousness away from thinking, what happens? You become very, very present in the here and now.

Whereas if you're involved in thought activity, you're never in the here and now because thought is always either in past or future. So here and now, the present moment is really the key to that inner transformation. So whenever the mind becomes still, what happens simultaneously is you become present.

And that in itself is a transformation of consciousness, that presence. And out of that presence comes a different sense of identity, a very deep sense of well-being that's inside everybody, but usually it's buried underneath the mental noise. Everybody carries inside a sense of peace and well-being and a natural connectedness with who you are.

But most people are not conscious of it. They seem to have lost it or they never lost it, but it becomes so covered up by mental noise that they can never feel it. So they are cut off from their deeper being.

And that's a dreadful deprivation. It's sort of like falling from grace, almost. Yes, yes.

And in a way, that is really the origin of this flaw that I mentioned earlier, what Christians call sin, Buddhism calls suffering, or Hinduism calls delusion. It's a disconnectedness from who you essentially are on a deeper level.

[Speaker 2] (18:16 - 18:17)

And a connectedness with all that is as well.

[Speaker 1] (18:17 - 18:53)

Yes, yes. And then what you have as a substitute is a mind-made sense of self, which we call the ego, which consists of past, of things that happened to you, of mental images you have about yourself, your conditioning. So it's an artificially mentally constructed sense of self, which most people's identity lies in that.

And because it lacks any foundation in reality, it really lives in a state of constant fear.

[Speaker 2] (18:54 - 19:21)

Yes, you mentioned something that was so profound, and that is most of us either live in the past, of, oh, this happened to me, living in the victimhood of whatever happened in the past, and living their life on, well, this happened to me before, so I better be careful, or worrying about the future. They're either reminiscing in a depressive way about the

past or anxious about the future. So the now is totally lost to them for the pleasure of just the presence.

[Speaker 1] (19:21 - 20:26)

That's right. That's essential that the loss of now is also the loss of being and the loss of your essential identity, because it can only be found in the now. So when people come from the artificially generated sense of self that we call ego, which is mind-made and consists of images of who you are, which you need to defend and feed constantly, and that creates constant fear, so you're never fully present here and now in this moment.

So the now, for most people, is never or very rarely acknowledged, and all it is really is a means to an end. It becomes reduced to a means to an end because everybody is striving to get to some future moment, which promises to give them what they want. So they're always reaching out to the next moment.

The now is reduced to a means to getting to the next moment. So it's never really paid any attention to, except as that means.

[Speaker 2] (20:26 - 21:09)

Or even fear of getting to the next moment. I remember saying to my daughter when she was having a party, let's celebrate our celebrations. People worry over a dinner party.

Will the food come on time, or will this happen right, or will this get burnt, or even on a holiday. Will my luggage get lost, will the room be right, will there be a plane crash? They even worry about going on the plane and say, how fortunate I am to be able to have the time to take this holiday or to plan this wonderful celebration of an anniversary or a birthday or some great event.

They're concerned about all the ramifications and all the details, and they worry, and then the event is over, and they're watching it with this watchful, frightened eye, and then it's over, and they're so thrilled that this wonderful celebration is over. How fortunate I am to have the opportunity to celebrate this moment.

[Speaker 1] (21:09 - 21:16)

Yes, and those people, they actually miss the whole celebration because they're in that state of constant anticipation and anxiety.

[Speaker 2] (21:16 - 21:21)

Absolutely. Can we discuss the inner body, or have we touched on that mostly?

[Speaker 1] (21:21 - 22:23)

No, we'll come to that in a second, because it's deeply connected with the now. But I'll just say something else briefly first, that we need to realize fully that all we ever have in life is this moment because there is nothing else. Yes.

When the future comes, it comes as this moment. People think things happened in the past, but nothing happened in the past. When it happened, it was the present moment.

It cannot happen at any other time. So you cannot feel, experience, do, or think anything ever that is not this moment. This moment is your life.

That's all there is. Yes, and we get conditioned at an early age to miss it. Already at school, it's constantly preparation for something else.

It's a constant looking to some future moment. So it's a very deep-seated conditioning of ignoring the present moment.

[Speaker 2] (22:24 - 22:31)

Ironically, speaking of present moments, we only have about four minutes left. So being in the present moment, now we have to think about the future.

[Speaker 1] (22:32 - 22:33)

Yes.

[Speaker 2] (22:33 - 23:37)

Because we have so much to talk about. I do want to say one thing, though, before we continue with the inner body, is that *The Power of Now*, and I'm going to show this to our viewing audience, is a wonderful book that is one of the bestsellers now of Banyan Books, and it can be purchased at Banyan Books. Also at the Greenhouse Books, and that's in the Denman Mall.

And for your meditation centers, which truly, I have to say, are life-changing. And actually exemplifying what you're talking about, being in the now and you walk away with such a great feeling of peace. And the number to contact you about the book, and I understand you're getting tons of email from people that have read the book and are just in joy over it.

So the number is 224-3179, and I'll repeat it, 224-3179, for people who want to partake in this great gift that you have to offer. So with three minutes left, and Namaste Publishing is the name of the company. And what is Namaste?

[Speaker 1] (23:38 - 23:43)

It's hard to translate, but it means approximately I greet the spirit within you.

[Speaker 2] (23:43 - 23:47)

I greet the spirit within you. It's a Mayan greeting as well. And so the inner body.

[Speaker 1] (23:47 - 24:59)

The inner body. Now, because the mind is so active continuously and continuously tries to take you away from the now, we need some kind of anchor so that we can focus our attention in the now. And by inner body, I mean having some of your attention in the inner energy field of the body to actually feel the life energy in the body, in your hands, there's life in there, in your feet, in your legs, in the totality of your body, to focus attention on that and feel that as much as you can.

When you're alone, you can practice it. Take attention away from thinking. Feel you're alive.

And you can actually feel the life that courses through the body. And that can become a very powerful anchor for staying present if you can feel the life that you are, the invisible life that animates the body. The chi energy.

Yes, you can call it chi. Have some attention in that, even when you're listening to somebody talking or when you're waiting somewhere, feel the inner body that keeps you present in the now and the mind can't easily take you away from that.

[Speaker 2] (24:59 - 25:09)

Your aliveness. We need to wrap with a message, and I know that you must have something to say to the people before that. Is that sort of an ending to this?

[Speaker 1] (25:09 - 25:36)

Well, I would say make the present moment your friend and not your enemy. Be friendly with it, and then you will see how life becomes friendly towards you because the present moment is life. If you make friends with the present moment and always say yes to whatever is, life becomes friendly towards you because life always shows you the face that you show it.

It's always a mirror.

[Speaker 2] (25:38 - 26:07)

Yes, and indeed it is. And I look at your face, and I must tell you, I see such a great deal of peace and such a great deal of joy, and I am so pleased that you came to write this book and teach us of the power of living in the now, and indeed it is a very enlightening process, and I find myself using it all the time, and it helps with creativity and productivity in life and truly celebrating your celebrations. And so, thank you for coming.

[Speaker 1] (26:07 - 26:08)

Thank you.

[Speaker 2] (26:08 - 26:16)

And thank you for watching Contact. I'm Nina Rhodes. Until the next time, please take care.